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Merkley blames speculators, big oil for high gas prices

Wants strategic oil reserve opened up

By David Sykes

Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley says high gas prices are caused by speculators who are not taking delivery of oil but simply buying and selling delivery contracts, as well as big oil companies who are getting tax subsidies and still making huge profits. On the other hand, he said he wants to see the country's 727-million-barrel strategic oil reserve opened up to increase supply, which he says would drive down prices.

Senator Jeff Merkley, speaking to a crowd of about 55 at a town hall meeting in Heppner Sunday, said the downturn in the housing construction is the reason for high unemployment in Oregon. *–Photo by David Sykes*

High school student Joe Armato asked the first question at a town hall meeting Merkley held in Heppner on Sunday.

"We are subsidizing big oil and they are making huge profits. Subsidizing them did not lower prices," Armato said.

"When oil goes to $60 or $80 per barrel, these companies don't need incentives. The tax incentives should be ended," Merkley said.

However, Merkley was much more in favor of making the country less dependent on oil than increasing supply, giving a list of things that could be done, including air foils on trucks and converting to natural gas as ways to cut our use of fossil fuels.

"We send $1 billion per day to foreign countries for energy. Lots of wealth is going to the Middle East countries. We need to lower our demand for imported oil," he said. In reference to the theory of man-made global warming, Merkley said the country also needs to "put less carbon in the air."

Concerning the lack of domestic oil production, Merkley again blamed the oil companies, saying they are simply sitting on many off-shore oil leases in the Gulf of Mexico. "They should use them or lose them," he told the crowd.

Joe Miller of Heppner asked why federal and state governments were subsidizing the wind industry, which is not an economical form of energy production.

-See MERKLEY TOWN HALL/PAGE SIX

Heppner water safe to drink

Over the weekend, Heppner city officials declared the town's water supply safe to drink again, lifting last week's boil warning.

Residents were warned to boil their water or used bottled water after the city's water tested positive for fecal coliform or E. coli bacteria last Wednesday. Those bacteria are usually present when water has been contaminated by human or animal waste, officials said. Water can become infected if a well becomes contaminated, a distribution line breaks or the chlorination system fails.

The bacteria can make people sick, particularly if they have weak immune systems. Symptoms include diarrhea, cramps, nausea or headaches.

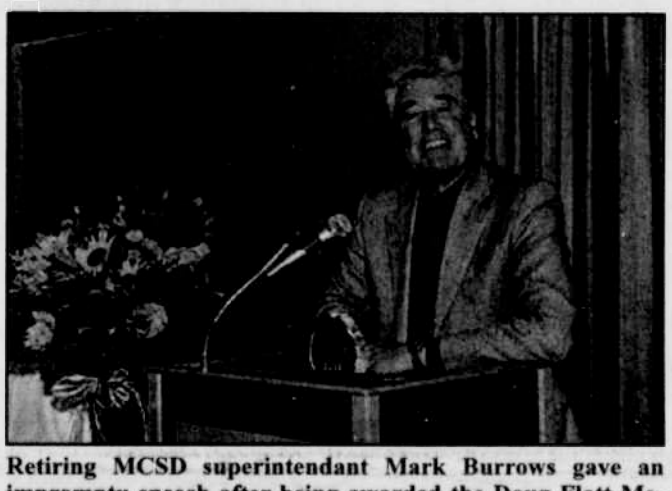
The bacteria was discovered during the city's routine testing of the water last week. City manager David DeMayo said samples are taken from the city water every week and sent to Box-R Labs, a state-certified lab in Prineville.

When results came back positive for bacteria Wednesday, the city took action and immediately notified the residents. Then, according to public works director Brian Harmon, city workers chlorinated all three of the city's reservoirs and flushed the town's hydrants to draw the chlorination through the system. They then took five samples and sent them for testing; all five samples came back clear of E. coli and fecal coliform.

City officials said the problem probably occurred during the recent storm, when runoff from the rain may have entered an underground reservoir. Harmon said that the city has taken special preventative measures at reservoir #2, ordering a new top for the reservoir so no water or debris can enter. The other preventative measure is simply routine chlorination, which has worked well in the past.

"I've been here 11 years," said Harmon, who added that the city had been chlorinating water before he started as public works director. "I don't remember ever having an E. coli hit."

Burrows retires on high note



Retiring MCSD superintendant Mark Burrows gave an impromptu speech after being awarded the Doug Flatt Memorial Leadership Award at the 12th annual Crystal Apple Awards this month. *-Contributed photo*

Mark Burrows will retire on a high note after winning the Doug Flatt Memorial Leadership Award during the 12th annual Crystal Apple Awards recently. The Doug Flatt Memorial Leadership Award honors a school district administrator for outstanding leadership in education.

Burrows, who has been Morrow County School District superintendent since 2004, is a former teacher and contractor who began his administrative career in 1997 as an elementary school principal in John Day. His school achieved some of the top marks in the state during his time there.

Burrows moved from John Day to Morrow County, where he solidified and provided vision for the district. He gained a reputation as an "outside the box" thinker and a team player who wasn't afraid to make tough decisions.

Umatilla-Morrow ESD Superintendent Dr. Mark Mulvihill said Burrows' "presence and strong leadership will be sorely missed in the future" as he retires from education at the end of this month.

Burrows, who was not aware he had won the award until it was announced during the ceremony, said he was honored to receive the award. In an impromptu speech, he provided some advice to other educators and administrators.

"We need to remember why we have school buildings in the first place," Burrows said. "They're for kids. That's why we're all here. We need to remember that."

Burrows and his wife, Anita, plan to travel after his retirement. He says they are talking about Tuscany, and also look forward to getting better acquainted with their two-year-old granddaughter, Livia, who lives in Portland.

Morrow County Health District breaks profit streak, loses nearly $112,000 for the month

After a three-month streak of gains, Morrow County Health District broke its profit streak last month, losing nearing $112,000 in April, according to figures released by Chief Financial Officer Nicole Mahoney at the regular meeting held Monday night in Heppner. The district showed a $58,325 profit in March, a $47,162 gain in February and a whopping $216,680 gain in January. As of April 30, MCHD showed a $9,251 average monthly year-to-date gain.

The district also held a hearing Monday night on its $10 million proposed 2011-12 budget. Mahoney told the board that she still may have some adjustments to the budget.

Board member David Burns told the board that he and CEO Michael Blauer did a walk-through of the Irrigon Clinic and met with the staff regarding what they would like to see concerning a possible clinic remodel. Blauer said he plans more research on clinic needs and remodel costs.

In other business, the board:

-received two bids to clean and repair the deteriorating concrete stairs and walkway at Pioneer Memorial Clinic: a $17,728 bid from Concrete Restoration Technologies, Inc., Seattle and a $12,300 bid from Concrete Restoration Technologies, West Linn, OR. The board asked for additional references on outdoor restoration work done by Concrete Restoration Technologies, but tentatively approved their bid if outdoor references are received. Mahoney told the board that she had also investigated replacing the concrete, but that proved to be "hugely costly." She added that finding concrete restoration companies had also been difficult.

-heard from Blauer that med students are continuing to work with providers at Pioneer Memorial Clinic and a physician's assistant has been scheduled to work with physician's assistant Sheridan Tarnasky.

-learned from Blauer that the federal mandate to change from paper to electronic records through Healthland is progressing, albeit slowly.

-heard a report from Blauer on current state and federal budget concerns with respect to hospitals. According to Blauer the state is looking at cuts to Medicaid funding. "On our end it's not any cause for concern or panic yet," said Blauer. Board Chair Larry Mills said that the state is discussing raising the hospital tax in order to create more money to leverage more federal matching funds. Currently, Pioneer Memorial, as a small hospital, is not required to pay the state hospital tax.

-heard from board member Leann Rea that the Veterans Administration is seeking a 1,000-2,000-foot place in which to hold VA clinics. Rea said she believed that the clinic could draw people from a larger area than just Morrow County and suggested that MCHD consider the possibility of working with the VA in establishing such a clinic.

-learned from Mahoney that upon board approval, the district is moving away from having two check signers and instead requiring only one signer. Mahoney said that the auditors had earlier expressed concern that she, as chief financial officer, approved expenditures and also signed the checks. With the change, Mahoney will approve the payment vouchers, Blauer will sign the checks and a backup document will be attached

-See HEALTH DISTRICT/ PAGE SIX

New name, new face at local sewing shop

Sew On Et Cetera owner Marlene Pointer works on a project for a customer in her shop on Willow Street. Pointer took over the location in April. *-Photo by Andrea Di Salvo*

By Andrea Di Salvo

Those with pesky sewing projects but no sewing experience will welcome one of Heppner's newest businesses, Sew On Et Cetera.

The small sewing shop on Willow Street is a continuation of the shop owned by recent retiree Helen Troxwell. The new owner is long-time Ione resident Marlene Pointer, who has operated the sewing shop since April.

Sixty-five-year-old Pointer was a career teacher, but seamstress work was no leap for this long-time sewer, who has been plying needle and thread since the age of nine. She started out under the tutelage of mentor Ruth McCabe.

"My mother didn't have the patience to teach me, so she sent me to Aunt Ruth," says Pointer. "I did my first 4-H project at home, then my mom took it to Aunt Ruth and she tore it all out. That's a heartbreaker when you're nine."

Ruth McCabe may have been a stickler for detail, Pointer said, but she was a good teacher who instilled a life-long love of sewing in her young

-See SEWING SHOP/ PAGE FIVE

Gazette-Times closed Memorial Day

The Heppner Gazette-Times office will be closed Memorial Day, May 30 for the holiday. All news and ad deadlines will be the previous Friday, May 27, by 5 p.m. The newspaper office will reopen on Tuesday, May 31.

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